



**It's Wednesday, December 1, 2021.** In today's issue: Train rescues; the Ford Center's weird machine; Support the HN Foundation; Nebraska's ties to infamous *Plessy* court case; historian Ronald Naugle; Nebraska archeology and Indigenous peoples; UNO 1969 racial controversy; Great Depression; *Women's Journey to Vote* event.

---

## Rescued from the path of a speeding train



George Poell looked out the locomotive's window as soon as he felt the pull of the emergency brakes. A small child was wandering along the tracks, and the train was bearing down fast. It would not stop in time.

Poell crawled out the window and made his way along the running board until he reached the cow-catcher at the front. He would have one chance to save the child. Timing was everything. Get it wrong, and the steel wheels would crush them both.

Although this story begins in June, it's also partly a Christmas story. [Keep reading](#) to find out why.

---

## What is this machine?



It may look like the cross between a space ship and an incubator, but this table is one of the most useful tools in the Paper Conservation Lab. You've seen old, warped photos and documents that won't lay flat? History Nebraska's Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center in Omaha has a machine to fix that. Watch the time-lapse video above and [read more here](#).

---

## From the History Nebraska Foundation



“Our history. Your legacy.” – is the tagline for the History Nebraska Foundation. The first part, “Our History.” recognizes that Nebraska’s history is forged by all Nebraskans. As Nebraskans, we hold our history dear and work to collect, preserve, and share it with our descendants.

The second part of the Foundation’s tagline, “Your Legacy.” recognizes that history is also personal. Perhaps selfishly, we desire to see some of our own legacy reflected in our shared histories. A legacy can be built in many ways – through deeds great and small, good or bad, but also through generosity and kindness.

Your support for the History Nebraska Foundation ties both pieces of the tagline together. By investing in the History Nebraska Foundation, you etch your name into the annals of Nebraska’s rich and diverse history, building a legacy that truly stands the test of time.

As Executive Director of the History Nebraska Foundation, I am proud to have the honor of working with the History Nebraska Board of Trustees and the History Nebraska Foundation Board of Directors to build a foundation that will ensure the preservation of our shared histories for the generations of Nebraskans who follow us.

I hope you will join us in supporting the important work of History Nebraska with a contribution to the History Nebraska Foundation. Your gift today is an investment in the future of history in Nebraska. Please join us in preserving “Our History.” while building “Your Legacy.”

Sincerely,

Tyler Vacha  
Executive Director  
[History Nebraska Foundation](http://HistoryNebraskaFoundation.org)  
(402) 583-4282  
[Tyler@Historynebraskafoundation.org](mailto:Tyler@Historynebraskafoundation.org)

## Nebraska’s connection to infamous *Plessy v. Ferguson* court case



DAN DESDUNES:

New Orleans  
Civil Rights Activist

— AND —

“The Father of Negro  
Musicians of Omaha”

By JESSE J. OTTO

**J**azz critic and historian George Lippert has observed that “established histories of jazz tend to focus on a select group of individual pioneers to only a few cities.” This group includes figures such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Charlie Parker, and these “few cities” are New Orleans, Kansas City, Chicago, and New York. Lippert contends that many of the artists and stars that have been neglected in general surveys of jazz history were attracted and that Omaha, Nebraska, is one such place. Before the end of the decade passed, around 1900, many black musicians came to Omaha in order to develop their talents and try to work their way into big music halls. Omaha jazz musician Private Louis asserted, “If New York, Chicago, and Kansas City were the major centers of jazz, Omaha was the right-A. It was wanted to make the big leagues, jazz came and stayed in Omaha.” Omaha’s Negro businessmen had long upheld a tradition of nurturing and producing prominent musicians, many of whom had been attracted to Omaha from other parts of the country. One Desdunes was largely responsible for beginning this tradition.

The Dan Desdunes Band on a 1923 “Goodwill” tour. Douglas County Historical Society.

In 1896 the US Supreme Court upheld state segregation laws under the principle of “separate but equal.” It established a precedent that stood for more than half a century, until the Court ruled against segregated schools in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954).

The case is back in the news. In November, a [Louisiana board voted to pardon Homer Plessy](#), a Black man who challenged that state’s segregated railcar law by taking a seat in a Whites-only car. Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards [said he will approve the pardon](#), which “takes away a conviction for something that should have obviously never ever been a crime.”

But Plessy wasn’t the first to challenge the Louisiana segregated railcar law. Earlier, another Black man name Dan Desdunes—later to become a prominent Omaha resident and bandleader—was arrested for defying the law. Why didn’t Desdunes’ case go to the Supreme Court? [Keep reading](#).

---

## In Memoriam: Ronald C. Naugle, 1942-2021



Nebraska historian Ron Naugle died October 26, 2021, in Lincoln. A longtime history professor at Nebraska Wesleyan University, Naugle also chaired the Nebraska Hall of Fame Commission and wrote several books. He is best known for his co-authorship of the third and fourth editions of *History of Nebraska*.



We at History Nebraska had the pleasure of working with Ron on his final book, *A Brief History of Nebraska* (2018). Written for a popular audience, it is a distillation of Ron's immense knowledge of our state's history. We're grateful for his dedication to sharing that knowledge. [Read his full obituary.](#)

---

## Archeology and Nebraska's Indigenous peoples

Archeologists are investigating sites and working with Native leaders to uncover Nebraska's past. Here are some recent stories.

### Apache in Nebraska?



Ancestors of the Apache (or Ndee as they prefer) lived in western Nebraska for at least two centuries prior to Euroamerican settlement. In the mid-1700s they moved southwest.

The story of the Ndee involves a centuries-long migration from the Canadian sub-Arctic to the American Southwest. Archeologists are investigating Ndee sites in Nebraska. [Learn more about what they're finding.](#)

### What are “Sedentary Siouans” and when did they come to Nebraska?

Did you know that many Nebraska Native peoples have similar languages? The languages of the Omaha, Ponca, Oto, Ioway, and Missouri are all of the Siouan family. These tribes have lived in present-day Nebraska since the 1700s. Archeologists refer to them as “sedentary” because they settled in villages and farmed. Nebraska archeologists are investigating earthlodge towns and working with tribal leaders. [Read more, and see more photos here.](#)



## Collaboration with Pawnee Nation, NDOT



For more than 60 years, History Nebraska and the Nebraska Department of Transportation have worked together to identify and minimize effects to archeological sites in the path of road construction. Both agencies are working with the Pawnee Nation on a project in Platte County. A bridge to be replaced is located within the boundaries of an ancestral 400-year-old Pawnee earthlodge village. [Read more and see photos from the site.](#)

## Update on Genoa Indian School

Researchers have uncovered the names of 102 Native American students who died at the U.S. Industrial Indian School at Genoa, Nebraska. The State Archeology Office (part of History Nebraska) has been using ground-penetrating radar at some possible locations of the school's cemetery, thus far with negative results. This work is being done at the request of the Nebraska

Indian Commission. The investigation is being led by the Genoa Indian School Digital Reconciliation Project. [Keep reading](#).

---

## Stories from *Nebraska History Magazine's* Fall 2021 issue

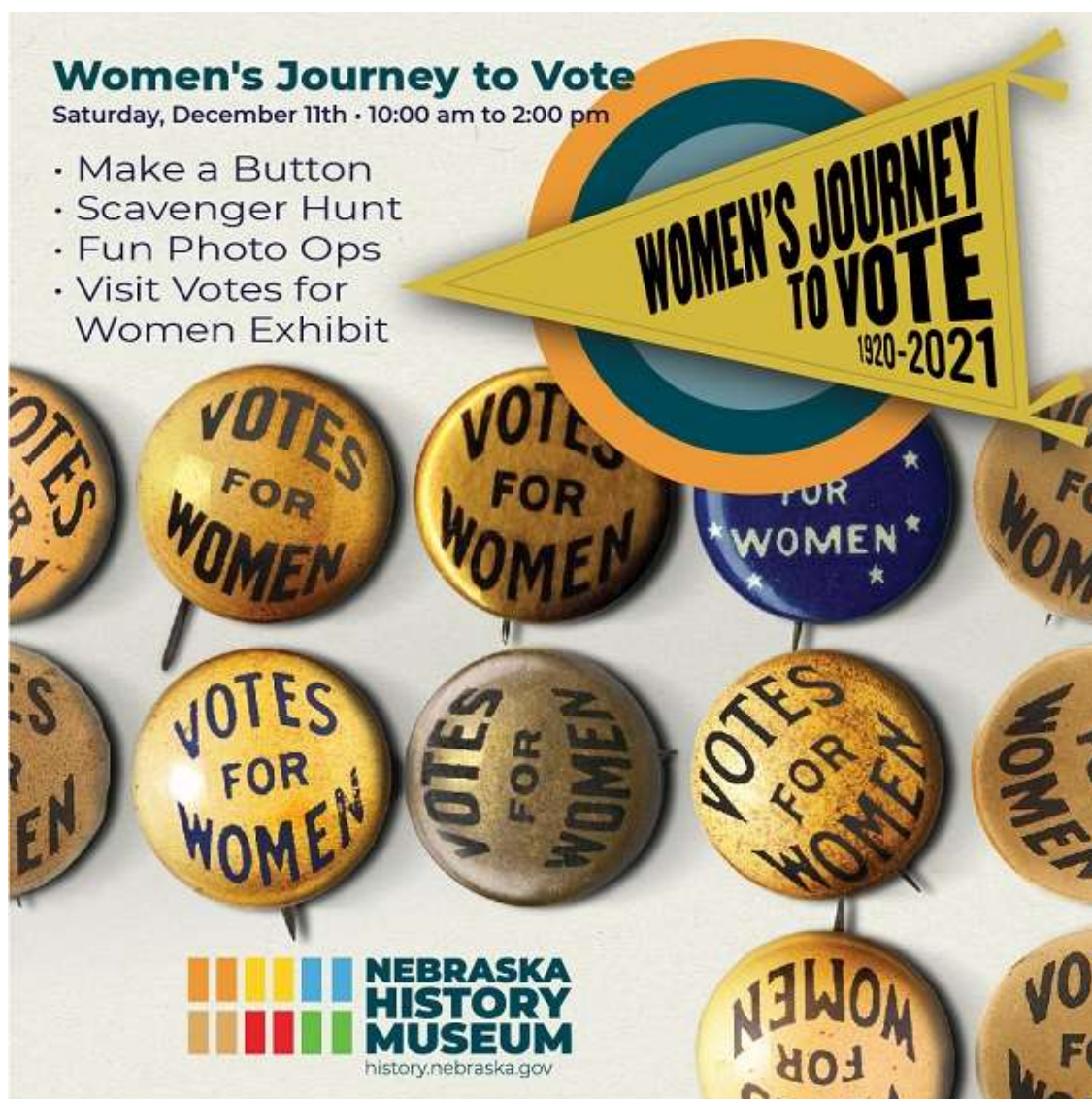


Here are short versions of two of the stories from the Fall 2021 issue of *Nebraska History Magazine*. You can read more, and see more photos, in the print edition. You can receive four issues of as part of a [History Nebraska membership](#).

- [Racial politics at UNO](#). The late 1960s saw Black students arrested at a sit-in in the university president's office, and White students demanding action against a Whites-only sorority. But collaboration between White and Black students remained minimal, and the students were deeply divided on the issues of the day.
- [The Great Depression in Daves County](#). How Chadron and surrounding communities responded to drought, unemployment, and bank failures during the Great Depression's bleak early years.

The Winter issue is coming soon! We'll tell you more about it in upcoming newsletters.





The Nebraska History Museum will host "Women's Journey to Vote" on Saturday, December 11. No registration is required. Just stop in 10 am to 2 pm! [Learn more.](#)



*History Nebraska Newsletter*, David Bristow, Editor, [history.nebraska.gov](http://history.nebraska.gov). © 2021  
History Nebraska®

Want to change how you receive these emails? You can [update your preferences](#) or  
[unsubscribe from this list](#).

---

This email was sent to [david.bristow@nebraska.gov](mailto:david.bristow@nebraska.gov)  
[why did I get this?](#) [unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)  
History Nebraska • 1500 R Street • Lincoln, NE 68508 • USA

---

**Complete articles:**

## Two daring rescues of children from the path of a speeding train



By David L. Bristow, Editor

In 1905 George Poell was a railroad fireman, soon to be a hero. One day the Grand Island resident was shoveling coal into a locomotive's red-hot furnace as the train rounded a curve. Suddenly the train lurched as the engineer put on the emergency brake. Poell looked out the window to see what was wrong.

He saw a child walking on the track, a toddler with blond curls bobbing.

"The little fellow seemed to have heard us," Poell recalled, "and in his childish way appeared to turn partly around and then toddle off straight ahead of the engine, as if to run away from us and beat us."

The train was near Powell, northwest of Fairbury. Reports of the train's speed vary widely; Poell described it as "a pretty good rate... on a down grade with a heavy train." It was not going to stop in time.

Knowing the engineer could not leave his post, Poell crawled out of the cab and climbed forward along the locomotive's running board until he reached the "pilot" or "cow-catcher" at the front. From here, he "snatched the child from certain death, and threw it to the side of the track," said the *Chicago Tribune*, but in the process tumbled from the pilot and "was dragged 300 feet, bumping over the ends of the ties. His right foot was torn off at the ankle, both arms were broken, and his flesh frightfully torn and bruised."

But Poell survived and was hailed as a hero. Just before Christmas, Poell received a letter from President Theodore Roosevelt informing him that he had been named the first recipient of a new medal of honor recently authorized by Congress, the Railroad Lifesaving Medal.

"No man could have shown greater coolness, skill and daring, or more heroic indifference to his own safety," Roosevelt wrote.

The president added that "It is not in my power to make you any material amends for the crippling injuries you received," and it went without saying that the railroad would take no responsibility for its former employee, even though he was injured on the job and the boy he rescued was the son of a station agent. It was up to local people to provide for the disabled twenty-five-year-old.



Poell posed for a photograph (above) with the boy\* he rescued; prints were sold to raise money to buy a small house for Poell and his wife. The young man needed a desk job, so Hall County voters soon elected him county clerk. Later the Poells moved to Kansas, where George died in 1952 at age seventy-one.

\* \* \*

And that's the end of story about George Poell, but how did the story begin? Meaning, how did we learn about him in the first place?



Part of the fun of history is that one story often leads you to another. Earlier this year a History Nebraska colleague, David Calease, sent me an article about a railroad fireman who rescued a child from the tracks by climbing onto the cow-catcher.

But it wasn't the story of George Poell in 1905. It was an article about Marion Lux of Lincoln in 1907. The incident happened along the Burlington tracks between Seward and Milford. Like Poell, Lux made his way to the cow-catcher—but Lux's story ended differently:

“With all the force at his command he hurled himself from the front of the rapidly moving locomotive, grasping the child around the waist as he fell. Over he rolled, the girl held to his side in a clasp of iron, and just as the wheels of the engine were about to crush the pair, he succeeded by a superhuman effort in throwing himself over the rail into safety.” (*Lincoln Evening News*, Sept. 30, 1907)

Unlike Poell, Lux did not lose any limbs. For some reason he did not receive the Railway Lifesaving Medal, but like Poell he was awarded the privately-funded Carnegie Medal. In 1920 the *Elm Creek Beacon* reported that Lux and his wife traveled to visit the girl and her family in Oregon where they were now living. The two families had been friends since the rescue and “Mr. Lux... feels an almost paternal interest in the child,” now fourteen years old.

This 1920 article was the starting point. None of us here had heard of this rescue. I looked up 1907 newspaper reports about Lux, and one of them made a passing mention of George Poell's deed two years earlier.

This, in case you've wondered, is why it takes historians so long to write books and articles. The whole field is strewn with rabbit holes ready to entice the curious.

---

\*Yes, that's a little boy in the photo. In Victorian times and into the early twentieth century it was common for little boys and girls to wear dresses. It made diaper changes easier, but is also evidence that even in such a highly gendered society, gender distinctions were not emphasized until children became older. At the time of "breeching," a boy would be given a haircut and dressed in short pants. (As another example, here's what future president Franklin D. Roosevelt [looked like at age two](#), in 1884.)

Top photo: Union Pacific train in Genoa, Nebraska, circa 1910. History Nebraska RG1298-11-3

George Poell photo: Chicago Tribune, Dec. 29, 1905.

(Posted 5/20/2021)

---

#### Sources:

Carnegie Hero Fund Commission [annual report] (Pittsburgh, PA, 1907), 31.

[https://www.google.com/books/edition/\\_/\\_k8xAQAAMAAJ?gbpv=1](https://www.google.com/books/edition/_/_k8xAQAAMAAJ?gbpv=1)

"Christmas Note from President," *Lincoln Star*, Dec. 26, 1905, 3.

"Fireman's Brave Act Saves Life," *Lincoln Evening News*, Sept. 30, 1907, 1.

"Fireman's Heroic Act May Cost Him His Life," *Lincoln Evening News*, June 28, 1905, 8.

"Hero Tells Own Story," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 29, 1905, 5.

McDowell, Charles P., "The Railroad and Highway Lifesaving Medals," *Planchet Press Newsletter* 5, No. 2 (Madison, VA: Planchet Research Group). Poell was the first recipient announced, but was the second to actually receive his medal in 1906.

"Poell Gets First Medal," *Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln), Dec. 26, 1905, 7.

"Ravenna News," *Elm Creek Beacon* (Neb.), Oct. 15, 1920, 3.

### Children's clothing and "breeching":

Goran Blazeski, "Most Victorian-era boys wore dresses and the reasons were practical," *The Vintage News*, April 8, 2018, <https://www.thevintagenews.com/2018/04/08/breeching-boys-2/>.

"Breeching (boys)," Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breeching\\_\(boys\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breeching_(boys)).

Lynn Downward, "19<sup>th</sup> Century Children," *Finery*, November 1, 2011, <http://www.gbacg.org/finery/2011/19th-century-children/>.

**Categories:**  
[railroads; rescues](#)

## Conservation Tools: Humidification and Suction Table

Conservators use a lot of different tools and equipment when treating objects and artwork in the lab. This blog post from us at the Ford Conservation Center will be about the humidification and suction table. Over the next couple of months, keep an eye out for more blog posts from us about our different tools and how we use them!



*The humidification and suction table used in the Paper Lab. The port holes in the sides allow the conservator to access the object without letting all the water vapor out.*

It may look like the cross between a space ship and an incubator, but this table is one of the most useful tools in the Paper Conservation Lab. It is a humidification and suction table. An ultrasonic humidifier, which uses vibrations instead of heat to produce water vapor, increases the relative humidity within the chamber when the lid is closed.

*A time-lapse video showing a tightly rolled panoramic photo being humidified before being flattened.*

The high relative humidity helps the fibers in the paper relax so the object can be flattened. This works for paper objects that are heavily wrinkled or have been rolled. Once the object is taken out of the humidification chamber, it is placed between sheets of blotter under a sheet of glass and weights are placed on top to flatten it.





*Paper Conservator, Hilary LeFevre, is using the suction table to locally clean a stain without disturbing the ink around it.*

This table is a multi-tasker. It not only acts as a humidification chamber, it is also a suction table! The suction can be used to flatten paper pulp into a loss. It can also hold pieces of paper together when doing repairs. But most importantly, the suction can pull solvents through the paper to reduce stains. By pulling the solvent through the paper, the stain is drawn through the paper instead of spreading outward through the paper fibers. A very small area can be cleaned without disturbing the surface or media around it. This means a stain can be removed without disturbing a signature or part of a drawing nearby.



*A parchment document is weighted around the edges with bricks and flattened using the suction table.*

**Categories:**

[Gerald Ford Conservation Center](#), [Gerald Ford](#)

# Dan Desdunes: New Orleans Civil Rights Activist and "The Father of Negro Musicians of Omaha"



Jazz critic and historian George Lipsitz has observed that "established histories of jazz tend to focus on a select group of individual geniuses in only a few cities." This group includes figures such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Charlie Parker; and those few cities are New Orleans, Kansas City, Chicago, and New York. Lipsitz contends that many artists and cities that have been neglected in general surveys of jazz history merit attention and that Omaha, Nebraska, is one such place. Before the end of the dance band era, around 1960, many black musicians came to Omaha in order to develop their talents and try to work their way into big name bands.

Omaha jazz musician Preston Love asserted, "If New York, Chicago, and Kansas City were the major leagues of jazz, Omaha was the triple-A. If you wanted to make the big leagues, you came and played in Omaha." Omaha's black bandleaders had long upheld a tradition of nurturing and producing prominent musicians, many of whom

had been attracted to Omaha from other parts of the country. Dan Desdunes was largely responsible for beginning this tradition.

The word "jazz" first appeared in *The Monitor*, Omaha's black weekly newspaper, on November 3, 1917, less than a year after the first jazz recordings were made. This word was used in an advertisement for a charity ball at which the music was to be provided by the Desdunes Jazz Orchestra. This band was led by Dan Desdunes, who was described as the "father of negro musicians of Omaha" in Harrison J. Pinkett's 1937 manuscript, "An Historical Sketch of the Omaha Negro."

Desdunes was born in New Orleans in 1873 to an upper-middle class Creole family with a penchant for public service and notoriety. His grandfather, Jeremiah Desdunes, came from Haiti and his grandmother, Henrietta, was originally from Cuba. Dan's father, Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes, was born in New Orleans in 1849. Rodolphe was a writer who, in 1911, published *Nos Hommes et Notre Histoire*, a book about the history and the culture of Creoles in Louisiana. Therein, Rodolphe highlighted the achievements of several successful Creoles. This work has been translated and reprinted many times, most recently in 2009.

Rodolphe was a staunch opponent of segregation and was one of the principal orchestrators of the *Comité des Citoyens* (Citizens' Committee) on September 5, 1891. He was the primary editorial contributor to *The Crusader*, New Orleans' weekly black newspaper, and held the meetings of the *Comité des Citoyens* at the newspaper's offices. Rodolphe succinctly defined the objectives of the organization:

It was in 1890 that the Citizens' Committee was formed, when a return to exaggerated fanaticism about caste or segregation once again alarmed the black people. This fanaticism was not confined merely to chance meetings. We were face to face with a government determined to develop and establish a system by which a portion of the people would have to submit to the rest. It was necessary to resist this state of affairs, even with no hope of success in sight. The idea was to give a dignified appearance to the resistance, which had to be implemented by lengthy judicial procedures.



In 1890,

the Louisiana Legislature enacted the Separate Car Act, which required railway companies to provide separate passenger cars for whites and blacks. It also required the railroads to physically halt anyone who attempted to enter a car reserved for persons of another race. After the Comité des Citoyens decided to challenge this law's enforcement in interstate travel, Dan Desdunes volunteered, in February 1892, to violate this act. Desdunes was one-eighth black, and according to Louisiana law, legally classified as colored, which meant he was forbidden to ride in any white railroad passenger car. Desdunes' skin color was light enough that he was able to pass as white and gain admission to a white only coach. The Comité des Citoyens was so certain that Desdunes would pass for white that it hired private detectives to arrest him in order to ensure that the committee could challenge the Separate Car Act in court. Dan Desdunes spent no time in jail because he was immediately bailed out by the committee. After a short trial, he was acquitted. Justice John Howard Ferguson ruled that enforcement of the Separate Car Act upon interstate travel was unconstitutional because only the federal government had the authority to regulate interstate commerce.



Next, the Comité des Citoyens decided to challenge racial segregation on intrastate railway travel. They recruited Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes' friend, Homer Plessy, to be arrested in this challenge. This case eventually went to the United States Supreme Court, which ruled on May 18, 1896, that Homer Plessy's constitutional rights had not been violated by Louisiana law. This ruling was devastating to Rodolphe, who reported that "our defeat sanctioned the odious principle of the segregation of the races." Whereas Rodolphe primarily dedicated his life to scholarship and civil activism, Dan Desdunes pursued a livelihood in arts and entertainment. The son's means may have differed from his father's, but Dan's career allowed him to work toward Rodolphe's goals. Dan Desdunes not only became a musician and an educator, he also worked against racial segregation.

To read more about Dan Desdunes, check out **[Jesse J. Otto's full article from the Fall 2011 issue of Nebraska History Magazine.](#)**

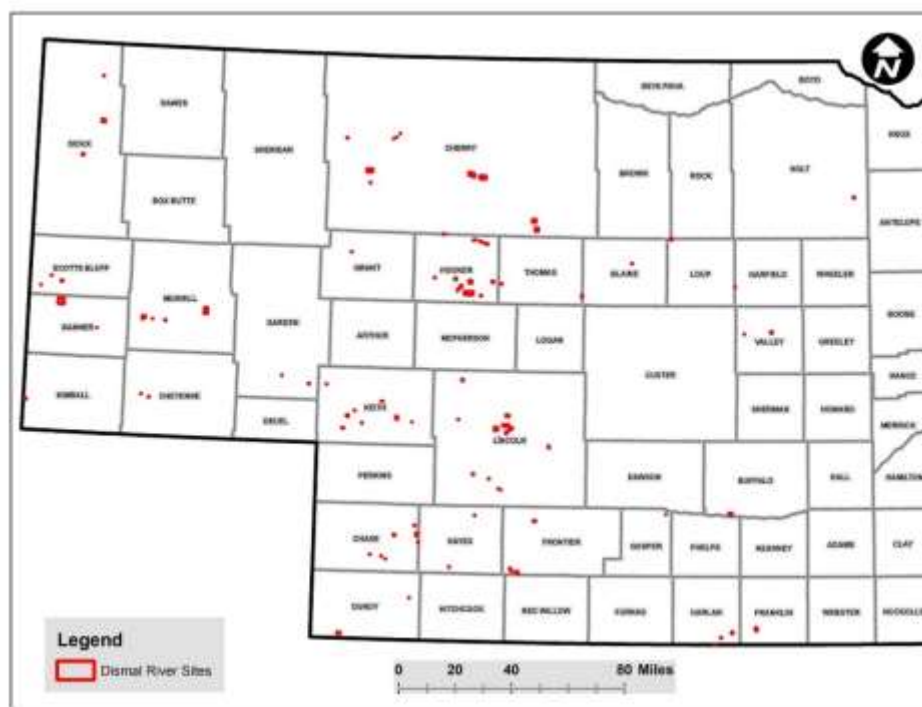
**Categories:**

[Nebraska History](#), [Flashback Friday](#)

## The Ndee in Nebraska

When people think of Indigenous Nebraska, the Apache (or Ndee as they prefer) is not a tribe that comes to mind. In fact, however, the ancestors of the Ndee lived across western Nebraska for at least two centuries prior to Euroamerican settlement. About 800-1000 years ago Athapaskan-speaking groups including the Ndee began to migrate south from the Canadian Sub-Arctic along the east side of the Rocky Mountains. This migration is expressed archeologically in Nebraska and surrounding areas of Kansas, Colorado, and Wyoming, as the Dismal River Culture which dates to ca. 1550-1750. The first sites of this complex were found along the Dismal River in the Sandhills -- thus the title -- but Dismal River is now widely believed to be ancestral Ndee. Several Ndee sites in Nebraska have been excavated

including, the Lovitt and White Cat Village sites along the Republican River and the Humphrey site deep in the Sandhills.



*Nebraska Ndee sites in red.*

Evidence of Ndee occupation is also evident through excavations at Ash Hollow Cave and Signal Butte in the Nebraska panhandle. Archeologists do not know exactly how these archeological sites relate to the different groups of modern Ndee people. The Ndee lived a semisedentary lifestyle in Nebraska, but likely more focused on bison hunting than the more varied subsistence patterns of more eastern tribes. Bison bones dominate the faunal assemblages in terms of the amount of meat provided.



*End of bison humerus (upper forelimb) found at Ndee camp near Courthouse Rock. Organic residue preserved in the bone yielded a radiocarbon date of 1625-1670. Impact fractures from extracting marrow are also evident.*

Abundant box turtle remains are also a common occurrence at Ndee village sites as are modest amounts of birds and smaller mammals.



5 cm



5 CM

*Box turtles were eaten and their shells were possibly used as bowls.*

Absent are fish remains even though the large villages that have been excavated are next to rivers. Recent work at the Humphrey site by History Nebraska recovered a floral collection of predominantly corn and chokecherry.

Known from archeological excavations at village sites, Ndee houses were circular with a wooden framework. Archeologists do not know exactly what the houses looked like. They lack the outside row of posts and do not appear to be as heavily







College students excavating the timber ruins of a Ndee lodge buried near the Middle Loup River.

Additional Reading

Bozell, John R. Courtney L.C. Ziska, and Phil R. Geib (eds.)

2021 2016-2019 Archeological Investigations in the Central and Western Sandhills Region: Blaine, Cherry, Grant, Hooker, and Lincoln Counties, Nebraska. On File, History Nebraska, State Archeology Office, Lincoln.

Champe, John L.

1946 Ash Hollow Cave: A Study in Stratigraphic Sequence in the Central Great Plains. University of Nebraska Studies, New Series No. 1. The University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

1949 White Cat Village. *American Antiquity* 14:285-292

Gunnerson, James H.

1960 An Introduction to Plains Apache Archeology – The Dismal River Aspect Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 173 Anthropological Papers No.58, pp. 131-260.

1968 Plains Apache Archeology: A Review. *Plains Anthropologist* 13:167-189

Hill, A. T. and George Metcalf

1941 A Site of the Dismal River Aspect in Chase County, Nebraska. *Nebraska History* 22:153-212

Hill, Matthew E. Jr and Sarah Trabert

2018    Reconsidering the Dismal River Aspect: A Review of Current Evidence for an Apachean (Ndee) Cultural Affiliation. *Plains Anthropologist* 63:198-222.

Strong, William Duncan

1935    An Introduction to Nebraska Archeology. Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections 93(10). Smithsonian Institution, Washington D. C.

**Categories:**

[Apache](#), [Ndee](#), [Native American](#), [Native American Heritage](#)

## Archeology of the Sedentary Siouan Tribes in Nebraska

While Nebraska is known for its remarkable record of Pawnee archeology, the state also is home to an important archeological record of tribes known collectively as Sedentary Siouans. The term ‘Siouan’ refers to the broad Siouan linguistic family (Chiwere and Dhegihan dialects) not specifically the nomadic Lakota of the High Plains including western Nebraska. The Siouan-speaking tribes discussed here include the: Omaha, Ponca, Oto, Ioway, and Missouri and unlike their very distant nomadic Lakota relatives, these tribes lived in large earthlodge villages in eastern Nebraska and practiced a sedentary lifeway featuring maize agriculture.

The Pawnee deep history is from the south while the Siouan deep history is linked to the ancient cultures of the Great Lakes and the Mississippi and Ohio river valleys. The earliest evidence of these people in Nebraska is the appearance of several large villages of the Oneota culture near Rulo, Ashland, Stanton, and Genoa in the 1200s. Oneota is widespread in Iowa, and portions of Minnesota, Missouri, and Illinois and the Nebraska communities are the western-most extent of the culture. During this time, it is not possible to determine which of the Sedentary Siouan tribes lived in these towns but these people appear to have retracted back to the east by 1400 and did not return for three centuries.

Shortly after 1700, the Omaha and Ponca (then a single tribe) appear in northeast Nebraska and the Oto established towns in the lower Platte valley between Fremont and Bellevue. The Ioway were also living in western Iowa but likely were in close association with the Oto and had some residency in eastern Nebraska. These tribes seem to have rapidly adopted many characteristics of the Pawnee who had already been living a short distance to the west. Some of the pottery form and decoration is identical to Pawnee and their relatives in South Dakota, the Arikara. Most significantly was adoption of earthlodge construction by the Siouans but they continued to also build traditional midwestern-style bark-or grass/reed-covered structures. The Missouri tribe joined the Otos in the 1790s and some of the Winnebago moved near the Omaha in the 1860s.

Several large earthlodge towns have become the focus of archeological work including those near Homer, Bellevue, Verdel, and Yutan. This work has resulted in a clearer understanding of the technology, architecture, subsistence and lifeways of these tribes and the nature of contact with European and American explorers, military and settlers. Today, the descendants of these tribes own reservations in Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin. History Nebraska archeology staff have been working with various tribal leaders and historic preservation staff on repatriation of human remains and preservation of ancestral sites.



Missouria, Oto, and Ponca leaders.

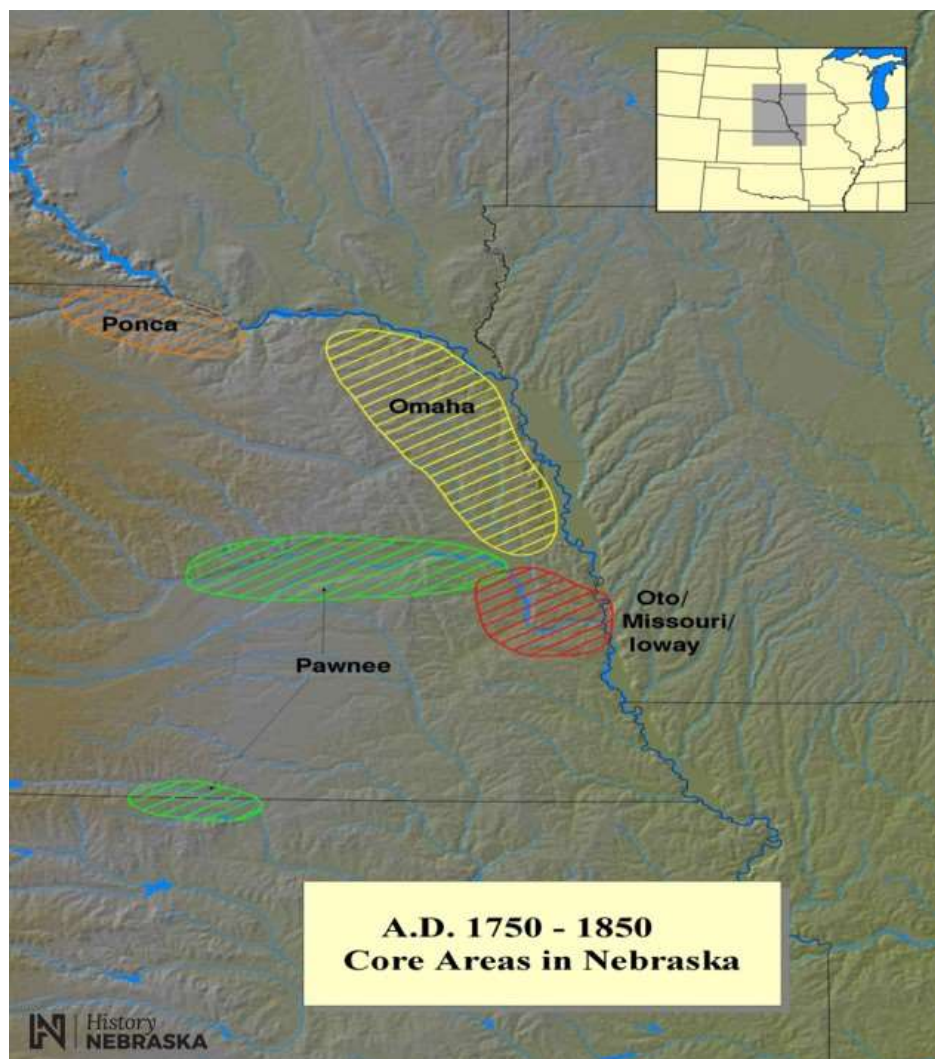


*Stone hoe or chopping tool from the Big Village of the Omaha near Homer.*





*Mid-nineteenth century Oto-Missouria village near Barneston. Note what appears to be a bark-covered structure along the center right of the painting.*



*Location of Sedentary Siouan and Pawnee core village areas.*



*Early Sedentary Siouan (Oneota) ceramic pots found near Rulo.*



*Early 1700s Spanish olive jar fragments found at an Oto or Ioway village near Bellevue.*



*History Nebraska archeology staff working with Omaha, Oto-Missouria, and Ponca*

## Further Reading

Carlson, Gayle F. and John R. Bozell (eds.)

2010 The Eagle Ridge Site and Early Eighteenth Century Indian-European Relations in Eastern Nebraska. *Central Plains Archeology* Volume 12(1).

O'Shea, John M. and John Ludwickson

1992 *Archeology and Ethnohistory of the Omaha Indians: The Big Village Site*. University of Nebraska Press. Lincoln.

Wood, W. Raymond

1993 *Na<sup>n</sup>za. The Ponca Fort*. J and L Reprints in Anthropology Volume 44. Lincoln.

### Categories:

[archeology](#), [Omaha](#), [Oto-Missouria](#), [Ponca](#), [Siouan](#), [Pawnee](#), [Sedentary](#)

## Collaboration Among History Nebraska, Pawnee Nation, NDOT

Nebraska archeology is renowned for its collection of artifacts and other information related to the Pawnee Tribe. The Pawnee lived over a wide expanse of what is now Nebraska and for longer than any other named Indigenous nation. They left a robust archeological record of villages, camps, sacred sites and cemeteries that become the focus of archeological research by History Nebraska and other agencies from the 1920 to the present. There are hundreds of Nebraska archeological sites related to the Pawnee and their ancestors and a large material culture collection is available for display and research. A more detailed treatment of Pawnee archeology will appear in the next issue of Nebraska History, December 2021.



The History Nebraska (HN) State Archeology Office and the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) have worked together for over 60 years to identify and minimize effects to Pawnee and other archeological sites along the state's transportation system ([Video Here](#)). Often in conjunction with HN and the NDOT, Native American tribes are involved in the consultation process on projects. A current project on N-22 in Platte County involves the Pawnee Nation. A bridge on the highway needs to be replaced. This bridge is located within the boundaries of an ancestral four hundred-year-old Pawnee earthlodge village named the Hanna Larson site. The site was named after the landowner at the time it was discovered in the 1930s. The potential of the project to impact the site was identified early in project development. By working with the NDOT and the Pawnee Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO), HN was able to determine that only a small area directly around the bridge would be impacted.

HN, NDOT, the Pawnee THPO, volunteers, and representatives of Loup Public Power District excavated one-meter square test units to determine if intact archeological deposits remained within the limits of construction for the bridge replacement. The day of the work began less than auspiciously with an early spring snow squall barreling through the area.





*Excavating in the Snow*

The excavations were disheartening for the first part of the day, but the dedicated team kept digging. They discovered on the east side of the bridge under two feet of modern fill dirt an intact buried soil containing stone debris from making tools and pottery sherds from 400 years ago.



*Buried Soil Zone Containing Archeological Remnants of the Pawnee Town*

One of the pot sherds was large enough to show a surface treatment known as simple stamping. Pawnee potters used a piece of wood or bone with a carved pattern to shape and thin their pots. This process left a set of regularly spaced indentations on the outside of the pots.



[Pawnee Pottery](#)

These pot sherds confirmed that the village occupation layer had been reached. Archeologists from HN and the NDOT were able to show the sherds to the Pawnee THPO, sherds from pots his ancestors had once used on site. Work on the project continues as HN, the NDOT, and the Pawnee THPO work together to find the best way to preserve the archeological deposits at the site.

**Categories:**

[Pawnee](#), [Department of Transportation](#), [Native American](#), [Native](#), [NDOT](#)

## Racial Politics at UNO



By Breanna Fanta, Editorial Assistant

African American students fought to seize their “educational destiny” in the 1960s, but history has been slow to acknowledge those efforts and amplify their voices. UNO’s double standard regarding the exclusivity of Black and White student organizations is a telling example of this. Brent Ruswick and Celine Butler explain UNO’s 1960s racial politics in “No Mutually Acceptable Solution: The Struggle to

Integrate Campus Life at the University of Nebraska-Omaha,” in *Nebraska History Magazine*’s Fall 2021 issue.

Activism in the Midwest was “gradual and somewhat ‘winding’” compared to more populous areas. Like many campuses, UNO’s student body was integrated within classrooms but not outside of them.

Recognizing UNO’s lack of diversity, a group of students applied for the creation of BLAC (Black Liberators for Action on Campus). The organization’s purpose was to “promote better representation” on campus and give Black students a chance to build close relationships.

*(Police arrest BLAC sit-in protestors, November 7, 1969. - Tomahawk 1970 yearbook, 65.)*

Despite BLAC’s good intentions, they received pushback in 1969 when the Board of Regents thought their constitution was racially exclusive. The constitution stated that membership was open to anyone “sincerely interested in promoting the purpose of this organization,” and the board asked that the language be revised.

After some discussion regarding the unlikelihood of White students joining and the objectives of the organization, they received approval. The university appeared



indifferent toward BLAC.

That was short-lived.

When BLAC hosted a dance on campus, they requested a Black security officer and ticket taker. The university's social director declined. They were instead provided with an all-White staff, and a single record player without any speakers.

Seeking reimbursement and the resignation of the administrators involved, 50 BLAC members quietly marched to UNO President Kirk Naylor's office. President Naylor agreed to a formal meeting, but told reporters there would be no negotiation.

In response, BLAC's president announced that students would occupy Naylor's office until their demands were met.

*(Pictured Right: University of Nebraska Omaha president Kirk Naylor. - Tomahawk 1969 yearbook, 34.)*

The authorities were then called, arresting 40 students for "unlawful assembly" and filing 54 felony charges against protestors.

President Naylor said he opposed discrimination but needed more evidence before he took action. Many students disagreed, believing the administration maintained systems of discrimination on campus.

Steve Wild, president of the Student Senate, criticized the incident and used it as an opportunity to advocate for the senate's influence on campus. Wild argued that the senate should be "the supreme governing body to which all student grievances must initially be present." He speculated that if it functioned this way, the incident would've been prevented.

Wild's predecessor thought that if the senate had "the power to regulate and supervise all student organizations," as stated in their own constitution, that they had a right to review all constitutions. So in the spring of 1968, they requested constitutions from all student organizations for review.

By the time BLAC's constitution was finally approved by the senate, half of the fraternities and none of the sororities had even submitted theirs.





(BLAC membership. - Tomahawk 1969 yearbook, 113.)

Greek life dominated student government and, being almost exclusively White, symbolized the administrators' acceptance of organizations founded on racial exclusion.

The most popular sorority on campus, Chi Omega, insisted on keeping their national constitution private. They wanted to protect other campus chapters where "such information may be used unwisely." This was in reference to the "mutual acceptability" clause in their charter, which required that new pledges be acceptable not only to the local chapter, but also to other chapters across the US. It was believed that all-White southern chapters would not approve of Black women joining the sorority.

In 1971 the Board of Regents demanded that all student organizations from all three campuses in the Nebraska system send their constitutions for review of "discriminatory and other unhealthy clauses."

The Zeta Deltas wanted to revise their national constitution. However a national representative's lecture about "mutual acceptability" indicated that they'd lose their national charter for pledging an African American.

Some members promptly resigned, and an investigation began shortly after.

On May 20, the student senate affirmed that the national representative led the sorority to conclude they'd lose their charter. The committee contacted the sorority's national office to clarify whether this interpretation was correct, but they received inadequate responses. The letters did not define "mutual acceptability" nor did they address or resolve the accusations.

The senate voted on June 10 to remove recognition of Chi Omega for the following year. This entailed the chapter losing access to campus facilities until they could provide evidence that they didn't discriminate on the basis of race.



CHI OMEGA — Kevin Dolen, Cleo Aulner; Row 2: Jan Nelson, Margie Hargleroad, Carol Strother, Robin McNutt, Jane Harrow Jeannine Giller, Laura Chavez, Jo Barlande; Row 3: Marina Montalud, Diana Fuller, Cindy Sheldon, Lynn Nielsen, Carol Mayhan Sue Hale, Mary Ellen Lynch, Cheryl Shreeves, Joyce Klingforth, Mary Jochim, Cris Kay, Peggy Kansler, Barb Eastep, Carol Knapp JoMarie Cech, Violet Kazlauskas, Deborah Magee, Gaylene Wagman.

(Chi Omega sorority. - Tomahawk: Summer 1971, 6.)

President Naylor acknowledged the situation but refused the idea to suspend the sorority. He sent multiple letters to the representative in hopes of preserving the sorority—an action publicly frowned upon, even by his colleagues.

This second-chance opportunity was a notable contrast to the ten-minute warning Naylor had given to BLAC to clear his office, or his refusal to pardon their felony charges.

Naylor received no response and a resolution was eventually reached: a 15-2 student senate vote in favor of suspending Chi Omega and censuring President Naylor.

UNO's student body and administration moved on to address other issues, but these events reflect the racial injustices of that time. Between the controversies around BLAC's sit-in and Chi Omega's recruiting standards, we can deepen our historical understanding of Midwestern racial politics and student activism.

---

The entire article can be found in the Fall 2021 edition of the Nebraska History Magazine. Members receive four issues per year.

**[Learn More](#)**

**Categories:**

UNO, Omaha, BLAC, racial politics, student activism

## The Great Depression in Dawes County



*("Chadron seen from the south, circa 1932-1938. Chadron State Normal school is visible in the foreground."*

RG3340-03-03)

By Breanna Fanta, Editorial Assistant

Chadron experienced an economic and population boom after its founding in 1885. Many western Nebraskans predicted that it would grow to rival Omaha in size.



Though it never became a large city, Chadron was a county seat and college town with 4,600 residents by 1930. Over the next several years, bank crises, national economic depression, and environmental calamity descended on Dawes County. Michael Sandstrom details the local response to these hardships in "Travails of the 'Magic City': The Great Depression in Dawes County" in *Nebraska History Magazine's* Fall 2021 issue.

Bank closures were a big problem in the early years of the Depression. With only two banks in town, Chadron residents were alarmed when one of them closed suddenly in 1929. Depositors did not know if they would ever get their money back.

(Pictured Left: "Chadron Chronicle, Nov. 28")

After a meeting that December, the Bank Depositors Committee placed the bank in the hands of a receiver who distributed the remaining assets proportionally to the depositors. Most deposits were eventually repaid, but this and other bank failures across the country harmed public confidence in the banking system.

Residents wondered if the city's remaining bank, the First National Bank of Chadron, would survive. First National was determined to demonstrate its stability, releasing quarterly reports of its financial condition and launching an aggressive advertising campaign to sway opinions. Two months later, First National reported a record increase in deposits.



Meanwhile, the county's farmers faced severe drought and dust storms. What rain that fell often came in severe downpours that caused flash flooding.



*("Grasshoppers in Cheyenne County, Nebraska, Soil Conservation Service photo." RG2570-17-14)*

And if the weather didn't destroy crops, insects consumed them. Newspapers extensively covered hordes of grasshoppers invading fields. Early articles suggested farmers scatter poison; by the late 1930s, local newspapers regularly reported news of hatchings and where to find government-provided poison.

From 1929 to 1932, Dawes County Farmers lost a little under \$4 million in grain and livestock—roughly the equivalent value of \$60 million in 2020.





*("Cut-over land abandoned by homesteaders' in Dawes County. Photo by Arthur Rothstein for the US Farm Security Administration, May 1936." Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division)*

As the economy took a hit, the community did what they could. The local teacher's college (today's Chadron State College) was a big contributor to the area financially. With that in mind, the college built additional dormitories to boost enrollment and in turn help the local economy.

But foreclosures, business failures, and unemployment rates continued to climb in the early 1930s.

An official unemployment rate is not available, but the number of unemployed workers equaled 10 percent of Chadron's 1930 population—including children and elderly people who would be working anyway. The unemployment rate must have been much higher than 10 percent.

Residents requested additional civic relief charity, and community fundraisers for the unemployed and dispossessed became more frequent.

As residents supported Chadron's relief associations, they also contributed resources to other areas in need by delivering train cars full of wheat and other goods to southern Great Plains areas.

Chadron eventually needed assistance of its own, and on April 22, 1932, a local paper announced the arrival of the first train car from the American Red Cross.

Chadron's economic relief organizations were soon stretched thin. Despite the diligence of Chadron residents, local relief efforts were insufficient. In 1932 Dawes County joined much of the rest of the country in voting for Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who promised a "New Deal" for the American people. A forthcoming article by Michael Sandstrom will look at how the New Deal programs reshaped Chadron and Dawes County.

---

The entire article can be found in the Fall 2021 edition of the Nebraska History Magazine. Members receive four issues per year.

**[Learn More](#)**

**Categories:**

Great Depression, Dawes County, Chadron